

## 4. Toward multiculturalism in eLearning partnerships<sup>1,2</sup>

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### Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a growing convergence between global information networks and higher education provision. Propelled by an overwhelming pace of “globalization”, open and distance learning is now shaping a borderless market for adult education in general.

Take two pilot cases from the two extreme ends of Asia: Turkey (Ozkul & Ulukan (2002) on the Anadolu University case), and Japan (Yamaguchi (2002) on the Tokyo Institute of Technology case). Anadolu helps teach market economics in Kazakhstan, a country of Turkic lineage formerly stricken with the Soviet regime, but eager to take off as one of the prospective exporters of natural resources from Central Asia. Tokyo Tech helps Thailand and other NIEs in Southeast Asia with advanced science and technology education not readily available in the region.

Both initiatives proposed a similar hybrid solution, tactfully integrating satellite delivery, Internet service, advance print/video material (Anadolu), intensive face-to-face lectures (Tokyo Tech), local tutoring, and extended (twelve to fifteen weeks) learner participation involving the whole group. Both cases report careful efforts exerted in adapting to the local educational contexts, in close collaboration with the partner institutions. Their success seems to be due to the high level of commitment of every party involved, as well as the high motivation of the students.

Drawing on such spirited practice of eLearning partnership, this paper intends to clarify a stance of multicultural orientation and some of the critical facets of educational design conducive to successful collaboration in this new era of borderless higher learning.

### Background

With the advent of ICT penetration in education, traditional teaching practice has been facing an enormous pressure for drastic mutation in both organizational and personnel terms. OECD/CERI (2001), for instance, summarizes the common tasks observed in advanced nations, although this list does not give due consideration to intercultural partnership:

- Radical curriculum change is needed in the Internet age

- Student assessment must be compatible with ICT-enriched learning
- Digital literacy is now a fundamental learning objective for all
- Schools must be fully equipped and supported for using ICT
- Schools need plentiful educational software of quality and easily-accessed information on it
- ICT in schools requires an extended professional role for teachers
- School leadership and management must be fully committed to adopting ICT
- School, home and community have new opportunities for partnership

Indeed, it is urgent and crucial that we take on this new challenge before falling behind the times. At the same time, though, this is exactly when our sane judgment is required. Innovation is virtue, as long as we keep to the core idea of our practice and learn from past failures.

Two recent arguments against indiscreet use of ICT are put forth by Gonzalez & Haselager (2002) and Ebuchi (2002). They share the notion that the permeation of ICT invites a reorganization of social landscape, linking local to global, enabling multi-channel knowledge flow, politicizing the links between technology and business, and changing business models. The rapid growth of eLearning in the higher education arena represents one example of such reorganization, and this phenomenon could also entail ignorance of the value of cultural diversity.

Every innovation has its own share of both beneficial and detrimental impacts on society, and ICT is no exception. For example, in spite of the rosy buildup of the notion of a knowledge economy, efforts to narrow the “digital divide” between developed and developing countries may pose a serious threat to indigenous cultures that are themselves evolving. Without enough time for creative digestion, local cultures may be exposed to industrial forces, born and raised in aggressive market economies, which are meant to help them catch up with the global ICT revolution. Knowing all too well that economic development is a necessity in impoverished regions, we face a catch-22 bind wondering whether the quick development of social overhead capital and human resources can happen without sacrificing local heritage. Influence of electronic literacy on traditional cognition and communication style should also be taken into consideration.<sup>3</sup>

Introduction of “fast food” culture, coined as “McDonaldization”, offers another case in point. To accommodate local diet, they develop culture-specific products like the “fisshubaagaa (fish burger).” However, such “localization” is only a piece of the larger picture: that is, the systematic implementation of a highly industrialized agribusiness and distribution network, conducive to the standardized mass production of “fast food”. Elements of the new lifestyle, including new job opportunities, may be welcomed by the locals, but may also come with a hidden cost, namely, the traditional diet culture, commercial customs and agricultural wisdom, at risk of being displaced by the new, highly sophisticated

production system. Only recently has the downside of the system, including excessive use of agrichemicals, shady meat quality, and hazardous nutritive value, raised serious concerns about dietary security, favoring a “slow food” approach, with product labeling that allows one to trace the origin of what one buys and eats.

So, this is not just a technology issue. What is being addressed is of a political, economic, and ethical nature. Moreover, it is a sustainability issue, given that the repository of indigenous wisdom, whether in written record or cultural practice, has been rapidly disappearing as a direct result of the “growth of ignorance” (Hobart, 1993), a trend that may be irrevocable by the time its significance is discovered.<sup>4</sup> That is why we need to employ a structural perspective, critically studying the present situation in terms of power distance and cultural imbalance.

Towards this end, Gonzalez & Haselager (2002) put eLearning in perspective by delving into the process of creative learning, and Ebuchi (2002) proposed a philosophy of the Internet based on a detailed cultural analysis of globalization.

Before turning to their discussion, we should note that style in technological advancement, as in language and communication, reflects the specific culture/value system that grows it. The Internet, for example, is incredibly convenient for all of us, and it is especially blissful for verbal types. Seen from a different angle, it is also unique in the sense that no other medium so thoroughly blurs the distinction between commerce and information. Few sites are purely educational, and though almost all Fortune 500 companies are said to have introduced some kind of eLearning for employee training, most do so for profit rather than as a systematic educational service. eLearning has been growing as a platform of eCommerce, in the particular context where entrepreneurship and practicality are highly valued.

## **Contextualization**

A Cameroon example illustrated by Ebuchi (2002) is quite instructive. Rural NGOs try to mediate between online multimedia material and illiterate locals with a view to improve livestock production. Such a pro bono endeavor championing the needs of a local community seems necessary when it comes to countering a flood of industrial forces. Intervention of this kind would be hard to achieve at a distance online; rather, it should be facilitated by on-site supporters, familiar with both the local conditions and the relevant hi-tech resources.

The Cameroon example also correlates with embedded embodied cognition mentioned by Gonzalez & Haselager (2002). Descriptions of the creative learning process in a Brazilian context illustrate the importance of a learning group committing to whole-body immersion for a marked duration of time. The multicultural background of the group called for careful facilitation efforts by staff teachers, which, in turn, helped a self-organizing process to emerge to the extent that the students “developed creative abilities, such as the disposition

to face uncertainty and problematic situations with an open mind looking for solutions.”

A lesson to learn from the case would be that since eLearning material is only one of a number of resources available to the fully present learning community, the key to success lies in the collaborative management of those resources, allowing for the flexible accommodation of individual needs. The Cameroon example similarly stresses the relevance of on-site supporters. This line of thought implies that eLearning should be contextualized into local practice. On-site educational interaction and user feedback directed towards the content provider may also play a role in redressing the cultural imbalances of cyberspace.

Returning to the Anadolu and Tokyo Tech cases, we find both authors also emphasize the value of face-to-face opportunities. In addition to including discussions with the local tutor as a course requirement, Ozkul & Ulukan (2002) further points to the significance of on-site interaction by proposing that “if it is possible, the instructor must visit the campus where the students are located and spend a week with the students.” Yamaguchi (2002) similarly observes that “it is certain that close communication among local lecturers, teaching assistants and students improved the students' study habits,” and acknowledges the importance of international teamwork in project management.

A comparable account is also found in the case of African Virtual University. As part of this well-known, large-scale World Bank initiative, Australia's Curtin University of Technology is fully aware that “there is no single model for market economies and students have to work in their own socio-political system once they graduate,” and that “treating knowledge as a dynamic entity flowing between institutions in partnership enables creation of collaborative structures that enhance cultural diversity,” thus highlighting the need for multiple communication channels based on inclusiveness, equality and respect (Herrmann, 2002).

With reference to localization or contextualization, it might be useful to distinguish the primary and secondary context. The former refers to an immediate, direct context in which people live and learn, whereas the latter refers to any of a number of external contexts, most relevant of which to our current discussion is the one formed along the global mainstream forces steering the ICT revolution and market economy, as seen from the periphery. Academic research and the higher education arena have also witnessed a great impact from the U.S. and European countries. Web contents and their accessibility, likewise, usually take for granted their own social background. However, in light of the expanding gap between the haves and have-nots, and the anti-globalism demonstrations, not to mention colonial histories and the present opposition to Americanism in some Islamic communities, that secondary context not only appears to differ from the primary, it may even contradict and denigrate local practices of living and learning.

Those two contexts may also parallel “Lebenswelt” (lived world) and “Wissenschaft” (academic study) in Husserlian terms. If we view learning as taking place within the

primary context, or “Lebenswelt”, we need a buffering process by which locals may conscientize their social conditions, contextualize materials usually originating from the secondary context, then construct their own resource network, with all these steps facilitated by experienced supporters. Feedback to the secondary context, or “Wissenschaft” may help keep it down-to-earth, and may even provide a breaking opportunity for new directions of research. Making explicit such processes merits special attention given the convergence of cultural forces made possible by ICT.

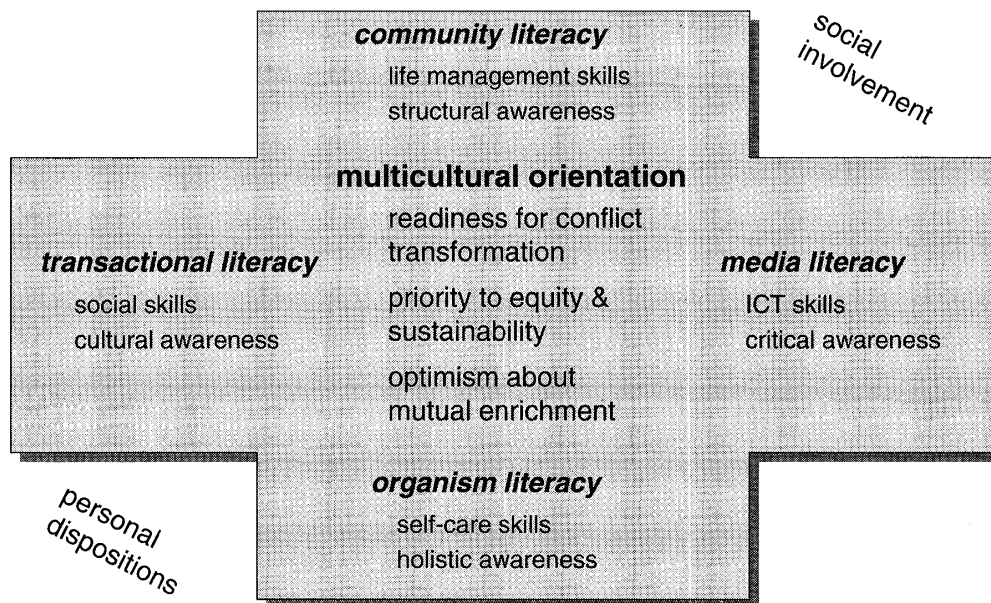
## Transformation

Multiculturalism admits a broad range of perspectives from educators, vendors, manufacturers, developers, and social activists. Monoculturalism is not just fertile ground for ethical acrimony, but it is now also an inappropriate business attitude, which runs contrary to profitability and competency management, especially in global companies.

Multicultural co-existence implies a movement towards mutual empowerment and creative conflict management. As Ebuchi (2002) points out, it is “equitable and cooperative co-existence of different cultural groups” that concerns us, not an overt, multicultural sharing of the planet, nor a simplistic assimilationism. It is our mindset that needs modifying, hence the “hidden curriculum” of our educational practice that needs critical reflection. In that sense, the “conscientize - contextualize - construct” process, mentioned earlier, should be crucial not only for Peripherals, but for Centrals too, for the purpose of becoming empowered and creative in diversity coordination. It is a social development issue any community has to address.

Expanding awareness for latent, elusive violence, which often sustains itself through social/personal habits, can encourage every constituent to become more vocal and to be heard in both personal and community spheres. These two spheres overlap because personality is in itself multifaceted. Our “possible selves”, even dubbed as a “multiple personality order,” are the foundation of our empathy and insight as well as the basis for growing beyond our original culture.<sup>5</sup>

In this age of unprecedented human mobilization worldwide, with national borders rendered more porous, multicultural co-existence is an increasingly urgent issue even in domestic Japan. Grappling with unexpected conflict and resistance, each community has to gradually transform itself toward a more co-existent culture. It is also hoped that a growing awareness within the majority group of diversity, regarding such issues as gender, age, ability, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc., might accompany the transformative process, just as Japanese awareness of long-settled Koreans and Chinese was raised through coming face to face with “newcomers” in the 80s. Acknowledgment of diversity is also expected to shore up one's individual self-worth, or the diversity within.



**Figure1 Four major areas of competence in support of multicultural orientation**

Figure 1 shows a tentative framework to specify four areas of competence underpinning multicultural orientation, which encompasses readiness for conflict transformation, priority to equity and sustainability, and optimism about mutual enrichment. Each of the four literacy categories consists of a functional set of skills and the mindset to properly put it into practice.

*Organism literacy* refers to the competence for looking after individual needs in terms of sensory, physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being, all elaborately intertwined in a self-organizing manner (self-care skills with holistic awareness). Assuming that the environmental and violence issues boil down to health concerns, this literacy is indispensable. It may also serve as the basis for empathic connection with other people. *Transactional literacy* is the one for effective interpersonal communication secured by adequate proficiency in language arts and cultural understanding (social skills with cultural awareness). Somatic and nonverbal cues are no less important especially in conflict situations. *Media literacy* has been highlighted these days, when it comes to computer skills and Internet use. However, without a critical look at how the particular information is collected, compiled, and then expressed, it would be hard to capture the intent of any message given as well as develop effective strategies for producing contents (ICT skills with critical awareness). Finally, *community literacy* refers to the competence for managing one's time, expertise, social roles, and financial assets to establish security in community. Every type of community, ranging from a close knit unit like the family up to by far the largest, world community, including virtual ones on the Web, forms boundaries and internal norms for efficiently fulfilling its purpose. Those norms, however, do not necessarily reflect the general consensus, nor do the

distribution of wealth, thereby creating structural frictions between different groups of members. This is where one needs to assume a taxing role of securing one's life course, concurrently with seeking solutions toward a more equitable relationship (life management skills with structural awareness).

Based on personal dispositions and varied histories of social involvement, each of us occupies a unique locale in the crossroads of those four literacies. Exchanging such variety could in itself provide a learning occasion toward mutual welfare.

Now, how about in cyberspace? Does community experience generalize into cyberspace, or vice versa? Are there resources available in cyberspace for community transformation?<sup>6</sup> What's the interface between eDemocracy and real-life democracy? These questions have yet to be considered before we can contemplate a prospective marriage between multicultural co-existence and eLearning.

## Conclusion

Exploring an uncharted territory is always rich in unexpected surprises, both inspiring and dispiriting. The argument made here reflects only a limited outlook for multiculturalism in eLearning community, a newly arrived trend with no solid success stories. More learning is necessary from a diversity of eLearning partnerships, before this area finds any detailed chart.

As discussed thus far, there are a number of issues left for future examination, among which are:

- how to design the optimal combination of ICT, with special consideration for the role of eLearning embedded in the face-to-face learning community, depending on subject matter, learner characteristics, institutional needs, available infrastructure (both technical and managerial), available resources (both financial and educational), etc.;
- how to foster collaboration in project management, content development, interface design, pedagogy, etc.;
- how to facilitate the learning process of cultural diversity and mutual transformation, both online and offline;
- how to support the empowerment process and foster skills in creative diversity coordination among participants, both online and offline;
- how to link co-existence efforts in real-life situations and those in various media/cyberspace processes; and
- how to steer the direction of multiculturalism, based on the understanding of power distance, ethical problems, and sustainability issues.

When we stop and look around at our historical, structural context, our track record does not seem so dependable. We know too much about our miserable history. If history repeats itself, learning from history would seem to be something beyond human capacity. Still, resignation does not help. It is our responsibility, living in the present, to pledge to future generations a better quality of life. Otherwise, they will charge us for nonfeasance or conscious neglect. Change can be painful, but it is a pain we must bear for the sake of our children.

## Notes

- 1 This paper is an extended version of the summary report on the NIME international symposium 2002, titled as “E-learning beyond Cultural and Linguistic Barriers: Co-existence and Collaboration.” The author owes special thanks to Dr. Tom O'Connor, currently a visiting scholar at NIME, for his scrupulous language assistance and insightful comments on the first draft.
- 2 A Japanese summary of the first session, which was moderated by the present author, has appeared in NIME Newsletter, no.33:

### [第1セッション：多文化共生とE-learning]

ICTの浸透はグローバリゼーションを飛躍的に促進しているが、米欧型市場経済システムへの一元化圧力の一方で、ローカルな文化の発信とネットワーク化も現象している。さらに、移動民の急増は、すでに身近な文化変動を体験させるに至っている。近代以降の時空間の縮小が加速度的に速まり、現代において質的な関係変容をもたらしたといえよう。こうした多文化接触状況における教育、なかんずく高等教育の国際共同におけるeLearningは、今日どのような課題を提示しているのか。我々の日常の営みからすれば、いわば地に沈んでいる課題であるが、それであればこそ、明確に意識化し、問題点と対策の契機を整理することが早急に求められる。

第1セッションは、この間に関して事例検討と理論的考察の双方を編み込むため、トルコ・アナドル大学のアリ・オズクル教授、東京工業大学の山口しのぶ助教授、ブラジル・サンパウロ州立大学のユニス・ゴンザレス教授、放送大学の江渕一公教授の4名でパネルを構成した。各報告のタイトルは、「遠隔教育における国際協調—トルコとカザフスタンの間でのモデル」「同期及び非同期遠隔教育の開発—ローカルな文脈に応じた協調学習」「多文化共生とeLearning—創造性と自己組織化の余地はあるのか」「政治的かつ倫理的プロセスとしてのインターネット—多文化文脈におけるICTとeLearningの含意」である。

セッションでは、まず、トルコ・アナドル大学からカザフスタン・アーメットイェセビ大学への、及び東京工業大学からアジア工業大学（在タイ）への、2件の国際共同教育



事例を検討した。いずれにおいても、リアルタイム衛星授業とインターネットが併用され、とくに相手サイトでのチュータリングや実際の講師とのインタラクションの重要性が共通に指摘された。高等教育分野での国際共同の成否は、ICTの各技術側面を有効に併用することだけでなく、関係者間の緊密なチームプレイが鍵であることを改めて痛感させるものであった。

次いで、本来の学習の条件、及びインターネット哲学構築の必要性に関する2件の批判的考察を検討した。ゴンザレス教授からは、全人的な参加による自己組織化過程を創造的学習の核ととらえる立場から、eLearningの設計・活用形態が反省された。一方、江淵教授からは、今日のグローバリゼーション状況とその背景にある文化間権力関係が分析され、多文化共生を理念としたインターネット活用の方向が示唆された。これら文化や学習に関する批判的吟味は、ICT革命の進行のなかで一層要請されることを確認させるものであった。

以上の報告と検討に対してさらに、メディア教育開発センター外国人研究員のトッド・スクワイアズ氏と神田外語大学長の石井米雄氏が討論者として加わり、フロアとの質疑応答も含めて、テクノロジーの非中立性や使用言語への配慮、共同授業のコストなど活発な議論が展開した。

扱われた課題はきわめて大きく、人類の必ずしも誇りうるに足りない社会史・技術史、文明間の対立構造、および自身に深く根ざした生活の自明性への深い反省が前提となる。今日直面している葛藤は、単純な原因帰属が可能なものではなく、さまざまなパラメータが輻輳したものである。それだけに、これまでなじんできた「文化」や「技術」、「学習」等の概念規定が、高等教育という装置自体への期待も含め、基本的検討に晒されざるを得ない。インターネットを始めとするメディア環境の激変からだけでも、「教育」イメージはすでに大きく修正を受けている。

本セッションは、国際共同のeLearning実践の課題を整理するとともに、歴史的・構造的観点によって文化的暴力の姿を炙り出し、多文化間のeLearning運用の方向と、メンバー間の緊密な相互作用の意義をあらためて振り返る機会となった。これは、現象としてのグローバリゼーションに抗して、規範としてのオルターナティブ・グローバリズムに向かうささやかな助走である。さて、ここからの努力に我々は耐えうるであろうか。

- 3 This is another issue to be discussed in depth, but should be set aside for further argument, due to the current focus on multicultural relations. Suffice it to say that technological innovations in communication seem to have affected the fundamental process of human cognition and interaction, not only the choice of communication media. Ong (1982), for example, made a groundbreaking contribution to the understanding of how literacy, and print media, might have reformulated our communication behavior in history. Heim (1987) presented a philosophical investigation into the impact of computerized word processing on cognitive functions. Shilling (1993) and Ihde (2002) discussed the influence of civilization and technologization on our embodiment process.

More recently, research on the psychology of frequent Internet use has been published (e.g., Turkle, 1995; Wallace, 1999).

- 4 The issue of endangered languages needs to be touched upon. One's mother tongue being the very basis of personal identity, linguistic rights should be by all means guaranteed as part of the basic human rights. Nevertheless, keeping traditional cultures intact in this rapidly globalizing age is almost impossible. Culture has always been in the process of hybridization, and so has language, unless forced to extinguish by massive disasters or some language shift. Protecting local languages as they are solely on an ethical basis might never be achieved. A more realistic avenue to choose would be reevaluating the vernacular intelligence for sustainable development, hence the language as its repository, instead of trying to preserve it intolerantly for its own sake. Along the same lines, Nettle & Romaine (2000) argues that locals have acquired a wealth of knowledge concerning a long-standing production system adaptive to the specific biosphere, and that, contrary to the failed one-size-fits-all development plans of European origin, their intelligence is now worth appreciation in view of the conservation of biodiversity and environmental resources. They also hold that local identity and global connection are both achievable by bilingual/multilingual education. Discussion on related subjects can be found at the Foundation for Endangered Languages (<http://www.ogmios.org/>), UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations Program Clearinghouse (<http://www.unesco.org/most/>), International Clearinghouse for Endangered Languages (<http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ichel/ichel-j.html>), Linguapax Institute (<http://www.linguapax.org/>), Ethnologue under SIL International (<http://www.ethnologue.com/>), Terralingua (<http://www.terralingua.org/>), and Virtual Foundation Japan (<http://www.sbpark.com/>). To enable multilingual communication in cyberspace, an electronic language for computers that acts as the Internet intermediary between different languages, instead of simply translating one language to another, has been developed by the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (<http://www.undl.org/>).
- 5 With regard to conflict transformation, it would be worthwhile to refer to three outstanding lines of research and practice. One has stemmed from the field of group psychotherapy and now extended toward deep democracy. Rogers (1970) blazed the trail of person-centered approach, rejecting the mechanistic view of human interaction held by behaviorism and classical psychoanalysis, toward a self-organizing process of group interaction. His invention, Encounter Group, tries to support the intrinsic growth orientation among members, through unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, and genuineness on the part of the facilitator. Another example is called the Worldwork, a transpersonal approach developed by Mindell (1995), where such active intervention as amplification or dramatization is used to process the deep psyche

of social conflict. The second line of practice comes from conflict resolution research. A variety of training programs have been developed for managing intercultural, organizational, and interpersonal conflicts (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000), including those for children (e.g., Kreidler & Furlong, 1995). Galtung (1998), one of the founding scholars of peace studies, has also developed a transformative means called the Transcend Method, to emphasize the importance of context or the deep emic text, as opposed to the skewed text readily acceptable with the target audience, and facilitate the reorganization of power structure. The third cluster of practice bases itself on post-structuralism, which pervades many critical approaches against today's globalism. An exemplar in Japanese college education has been reported by Kurachi (1998), who employs journaling for cultivating a reflexive learning set among the mainstream population. A recently burgeoning field of performance studies is promising in that it addresses the performative actions embodying hegemonic relationship in community (Boal & Jackson, 2002; Schechner, 2002; Stucky & Wimmer, 2002).

- 6 Research held in Japan implies a positive impact of Internet communication onto cultural appreciation and social support of real-life coping. Akahori (1999), for instance, observed that his subject children gained more awareness of their own culture through email and BBS interaction with overseas counterparts. Hashimoto (2002) reported that Internet use contributed to the adaptation process among foreign students, through IM and email, Internet phone calls, and website access to the pages of their own language. Current upsurge in various ethnic media and diaspora networks may well recover and boost their self-worth, too. However, both researchers seem to agree that encouragement of access to the sites published in foreign languages, coupled with scaffolding for a lively interaction with other cultures, be necessary, if the students are to experience cultural diversity and learn to manage potential conflicts.

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